You Are Not My Kid's Mom
The case against day care

Spring 1998 ◆ Number 15

The Women's Quarterly

She's Back!

The New Housewife could have made partner but chucked it all to move to the suburbs and raise kids. Just no jokes about baking cookies

By *Meghan Cox Gurdon*

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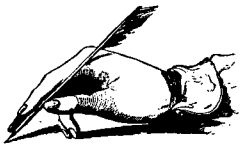
Diary



The Mother of All Problems

EVERY WORKING MOTHER knows the feeling. The pain of saying good-bye to small children in the morning. The worry for them throughout the day. The nagging guilt that you're not doing the best thing for them. The exhaustion of leading two full-time lives: one as worker, the other as mother.

Perhaps this explains why the majority of working mothers say they'd rather stay home or work part-time than work full-time. Not only that, a recent poll shows that a majority of both women and men feel that it's a step in the wrong direction for mothers of small children to work outside the home. (See Karlyn Bowman's "Poll Pourri.")

Unfortunately, the politicians who say they'd like to help working mothers are deaf to what working mothers actually want. Instead, they listen to day-care advocates and feminist groups who insist that women need and want more time away from their children, and not less. When you think about it, it's strange that in all the public discussions of the problems faced by working mothers, the most animating aspect of motherhood—that we love our children more than anything else, and want to be with them as much as we possibly can—goes unmentioned. This is not because it is an obvious fact of nature that everyone takes for granted. Rather, it's a fact that is now too explosive to confront.

For more than thirty years, the women's movement has told us that we would be happier, more fulfilled human beings if we left our homes and children and went out to work. We've been urged to put our work ahead of our families or at the very least, attempt to "balance" the demands of boss and baby. And in this, the women's movement has been spectacularly persuasive. The mother who does not work outside her home has become a social and statistical novelty: Day-care advocates like to point out that sixty percent of mothers of pre-school children now work for wages.

My generation was raised to believe that by providing for our children's physical and material needs, we could compensate for the maternal comfort they lost by having us at work. Just so long as they were in "good care," we were told, we wouldn't have to worry about compromising our careers. But this has proven to be a chimera: No amount of Fisher-Price gee gaws and cheerfully painted walls and chirping, brisk day-care workers can replace a mother's love and attention. Nor can putting our children in these surroundings ease our maternal fears for their well-being and our aching longing for their company. In all the breaking down of barriers women have done over a generation, this last remaining barrier—our love for our children—is the stubborn one we haven't been able to push through.

A friend of mine once told me about a Christmas Eve she spent at work, writing a newsletter her boss insisted get finished that night. She said it nearly broke her heart thinking about her two little kids waiting for her to come home while she labored like some modern-day female Bob Cratchit over the cheerless jargon of a routine corporate report. (The report, of course, was forgotten by the next week, but her children to this day remember the Christmas Eve their mother didn't come home.) When Brenda Barnes, one of the highest ranking female executives in the United States, resigned from her job as CEO of Pepsi-Cola North America last fall, she'd come to a similar conclusion about the effect of her work on her kids. She made the decision, she told the press, when one of her children said it would be okay to keep working if Barnes could "promise to be at home for all our birthdays."

So it's with some defensiveness that the same advocates who promised that work would be a panacea for women now claim that if it's not, the blame belongs to a society unwilling to provide adequate child care. If we had government-funded, high-quality day care, they say, women would no longer be thwarted by the demands of their children and could fully realize their potential as citizens and workers. It doesn't seem to matter that parents have shown a marked aversion to the sort of institutional day care these advocates wish to foist upon them: Only 1.8 million of the ten million children under five whose mothers work are in institutional care (the majority are minded by fathers, grandparents, and other relatives).

Nor does it seem to matter that a careful reading of the very sketchy research on children in day care leaves in place the commonsense conclusion

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She's Back!

Meghan Cox Gurdon on the New Housewife

GROWING UP IN the slipstream of feminism, my friends and I had definite notions of what we would be when we grew up. We would become pilots, lawyers, actresses, photographers, and tycoons. We knew, with absolute certainty, that we would amount to something. Never, *ever*, would any of us settle for being just a housewife. Ugh, can you imagine?

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I was born in 1964, a year after Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*. If there was any occupation less hip, less relevant, than housewifery, I for one could not imagine what it was. Housewives wore polyester chintz housedresses, baked bundt cakes in their ranch homes, and then drove station wagons to PTA meetings. They were dull, unsexy, fretted over trivialities, and lived vicariously through their husbands and children in order to compensate for their own pathetic incompleteness.

Given that we were just children when we formed these strong opinions, it seems to me now a remarkable testament to the feminist iconoclasm of the time. The feminists offered a more sinister message as well: Dark things happened inside those deceptively cheery ranch houses. Back then, I thought *Diary of a Mad Housewife* was a true memoir. *The Stepford Wives* made an even bigger impression on me. After leafing through my mother's copies of *Ms.*, the idea of men murdering their liberated wives in order to reincarnate them as busty robots seemed entirely plausible. When I actually read Friedan's book in college, twenty years later, it was like hearing echoes from childhood. Friedan was merely confirming all that I already believed about the horrors of the domestic sphere and the vacuous falsity of a housewife's day.

That I had never to my knowledge met a housewife in no way modified my prejudices. Nor did it dent my conviction that this was a way of life not merely to be avoided, but to be run from, screaming. And who could blame me? Post-Sixties popular culture (at least in New England, where I grew up) taught that for a woman to marry and manage her household was, at its mildest, embarrassingly retrograde. My own mother worked when I was a child, for which I admired her enormously. Girls like us were obliged to be ambitious.

Looking back, it's not that popular culture offered *no* positive role models of women at home. Television gave us Mrs. Brady and her bunch, for example. But by the time such shows were in after-school re-runs, the thunderings of the feminist revolution had turned her—not to mention her *compagneras* Harriet Nelson and Mrs. Cleaver—into quaint figures of fun, whom we viewed with irony. When I arrived at Bowdoin College, in 1982, the Mad Housewife had long since become a stock character in student-written theatricals. In one such production that year, I played a housewife whose mind suddenly snaps when her oafish husband demands a special meal. Too broken to rebel, she climbs into her oven and repeats dully, "But I made meatloaf...." It was also at Bowdoin that students successfully agitated to prevent Barbara Bush from delivering a speech. What had *she* ever done, we asked each other indignantly. Mrs. Bush was just a housewife. Obviously, she had nothing of interest to say.

Well now, how to admit this? Reader, I grew up and became a housewife.

It happened gradually, but to a degree that would leave my younger self flabbergasted. I graduated from college, and went on to become a foreign correspondent for public radio. So far so good. I met and married a man, also a journalist. We had a daughter and I continued to work, taking assignments around the globe.

It was two years ago, when pregnant with my second child, that I felt the first misgivings about the wisdom of my career. It was a fine summer day, and I was hunkered down on the city walls of Londonderry as Catholics and Protestants were going at each other. Bottles smashed into the corrugated iron barricades, and I had to choose between protecting my radio equipment or shielding my swollen belly. Was I, perhaps, pushing this working motherhood business too far?

"This is no place for you!" a policeman in riot gear called out to me, looking pointedly at my figure of six-months-and-counting. There was a time when I would have resented such paternalistic meddling, but not that day. Suddenly images of broken glass, plastic bullets, and weeping children began flashing through my mind. *What on earth was I doing?* Another bottle splintered near my head. I made a loud joke about needing a maternity-style flak jacket, and scuttled away to safety.

That day marked the beginning of full-time wife-and-motherhood for me, though it was not until my son was born later that fall that I actually stopped being a foreign correspondent. I'd spent two years packing my suitcases at night to avoid my small daughter's increasing agitation with my absences. I would call home most mornings from wherever I happened to be—Jerusalem, Paris, Istanbul—to sing her a lullaby. What a life! I had a lovely child, a wonderful nanny, a supportive husband, and stimulating work. I fancied that I excited admiration amongst my peers and family for not being one of those pathetic women who "stay home and bake cookies." So what mattered the odd stab of guilt as I bought another airline ticket? Or the occasional twinge of envy at my daughter's daily excursions with her nanny?

As it happens, plenty. After that day

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on the Londonderry walls, I converted to the cause of my own children. I would not be away on assignment the day my son learned to crawl, as I had been with my daughter. No more would the nanny be the one to take them on pleasant strolls, soothe their tears, or praise their little acts of triumph, while I was off earning frequent flyer miles. I would stay home with them myself.

And that's when I discovered how tricky it can be for thirty-something professionals like me to immerse ourselves in domesticity when our lifelong expectations, and virtually all of our role models, are outside of it. It didn't help that my conversion from guerilla girl to *hausfrau* coincided with a move from London, where my husband and I had been based, to his new posting in Washington.

It was bleak mid-winter and we were living in hotels. My daughter missed her nanny. My husband was preoccupied with his new job. My son was still tiny and my figure, consequently, was still dumpy. All these factors contributed to unexpected feelings of aimlessness and envy. It hurt my pride to push a pram along streets crowded with striding, purposeful, briefcase-wielding women my own age. So awful was my sense of diminished social status that I began to put a spin on my activities: "Oh, I'm a radio journalist," I'd say, "*on extended maternity leave.*"

Then there was the practical challenge of using up the time I would ordinarily have spent on the phone, at the computer, on a deadline, or on a plane. I found myself compiling absurd lists of chores (buy milk, do laundry) so that I could have the pleasure of striking them out, one by one, thus simulating the sense of progress that enlivens a working person's day. I hadn't bargained on the boredom—or rather, what initially felt like boredom—of spending all day with small, volatile people who are not interested in foreign affairs and need a lot of feeding.

But slowly, and—shock of all shocks!—with dawning happiness, I began to learn how to be a wife and mother, not just during an hour of "quality time" after work, but all the time.

Since becoming a housewife, I've become acquainted with scores of women doing the same thing. And oddly, not one of these women resembles the grotesques of post-Sixties paranoia. They are not bored, foolish, or frustrated. They are not popping pills between endless games of Canasta, nor are they drab mouses bullied by their husbands and children. Not one of them is even overweight.

Of the two dozen housewives I know best, all but one has a minimum of a bachelor's degree. Most of us left successful professional careers after our children were born, and most of us are in our thirties. During our coffee mornings—yes! sometimes we meet for coffee!—we talk politics as much as we do infant-feeding schedules. We wear jeans, miniskirts, and leggings. I have yet to glimpse a flowered housedress.

I was among the many irritated when Sen. Chris Dodd (D-Conn.) recently dismissed a tax credit for stay-at-home moms as a subsidy for "wealthy women who spend their time playing golf and tennis." But he was on to something: In these days of economic plenty, one does see an awful lot of shiny Jeep Cherokees and vast Chevy Suburbans driven by sunglass-wearing mothers with cargoes of smartly-dressed children. They—*we*—are the very exemplars of traditional, successful family life that liberals find irksome.

More maddening still for such critics is the superiority that happy, nuclear, mother-at-home families often exude. The husbands of the housewives I know are, to a man, proud and relieved that their children are not in institutional care. My friend Martin says ten years ago he would have been embarrassed *not* to have a wealth-producing wife. Now that the couple has young children, he regards his wife's ability to care for them herself as a sign of their mutual success. Staying at home in the 1990s has, for many educated women, become what getting an MBA was in the 1980s: a mark of achievement and status.

Not that everyone sees it that way, of course. I ran into a former colleague recently, a thirtyish radio correspondent who, like me, has lived around the world and reported dangerous and exciting stories. Her face crinkled with incredulity when I told her of my current goings-on: "But what do you *do* all day?"

This is still, for many housewives, the great unanswerable question, the one dinner-party query that leaves all but the most self-assured gasping like beached tuna. Hurriedly, we use the past tense: "I'm—er, I used to be a diplomat/lawyer/fill-in-the-blank." Or we smile apologetically: "I'm just a stay-at-home mom." Some of us rehearse sassy responses which never have the brio in public that they seem to at home, such as: "What do I do?" (Tinkly laughter.) "Whatever I like. What do *you* do?"

What we do is outwardly unremarkable, hence the difficulty in coming up with a pithy noun to describe it. We ferry children to and

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from schools and playgroups, load groceries into cars—or minivans and sport utility vehicles, if we're fully embracing our role—organize visits from electricians, and arrange kiddie picnics. To amuse and educate children while keeping everyone clean and fed is no small feat. I hadn't realized the extent to which housewifery is an acquired skill, nor how difficult it would be to transcend the stereotypes surrounding it. Where, in our post-Sixties store of cultural images, is the intellectual housewife? The jazzy mother? She isn't in the pages of *Ms.*, that's for sure. Nor did she ever appear in my women's history classes at college.

"No one thinks being a housewife is heady and romantic and exuberant and sexy," sighs my friend Clare, who, after enduring painful fertility treatments, gave up a big-deal job in real estate development when her son was born. (Actually, I wonder about the unsexy part: When I punched in "housewife" on an Internet search engine, the first thing it pulled up was pornography.)

The trouble is that most profound human experience cannot be boiled down into a neat phrase. The point of being at home is the *being*, not the *doing*. It's like Zen. Outwardly, you perform mundane tasks. Inwardly, you feel you are the heart of your family. This is not an attack on working mothers. When I was employed full-time, I felt wonderfully close to my husband and daughter (and to our nanny, who was, in retrospect, the heart of our family then). But it's easier to keep your temper when you don't have a train to catch. It's nicer to do finger-painting when everyone feels like it, rather than when it's on the Quality Time schedule.

Indeed, the dark secret of housewifery—the thing none of us knew until we gave up our paid jobs—is that it's fun. And it's deeply gratifying. Everyone gets frazzled occasionally, but one has the opportunity with this kind of life to escape the bruising rhythms of the larger world. We don't spend our time under fluorescent lights. We never have to face office politics. We don't receive paychecks, either, but we do have the luxury of time.

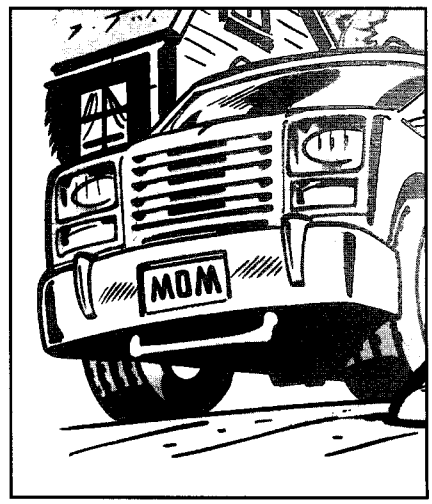
The housewives I know deal with the groceries and cooking and all the other drudgery and yet still manage to paint, write, play piano, ride horses, fiddle about on the Internet, and volunteer for charities and schools. They have great reserves of energy and patience for small children. These women, it seems to me, understand more about real human interaction and deep emotional fulfillment than the cranky feminists who tut-tut that we're wasting our potential, "giving up our lives," and generally lounging around having pedicures.

I REALIZE THAT I'm writing with the zeal of the converted, a zeal that startles my mother, the *Ms.* subscriber. She still believes wholeheartedly in feminism, though, like many a chastened revolutionary, she admits that some excesses may have occurred. In fact, it was she who first urged me to reduce my work commitments so I'd have more time with my young children. Yet when I gave up work altogether, she described me, with evident dismay, as going "by the wayside...."

We new housewives have got to get that idea out of people's heads. We are not on the periphery of society: We are at the center of it. It's ludicrous to believe that an educated woman is less interesting, and somehow marginalized, because she doesn't bring home a paycheck. It took feminists just two decades to destroy the public pride and private satisfaction that many women used to draw from the domestic sphere. It wasn't men who trashed the gentler arts. And it isn't men who reproach women like me for "giving up," or who purse their lips resentfully at the very mention of our occupation.

Let's just stop this nonsense. We have nothing for which to apologize, and a great deal in which to exult. Further, there is no need to strain for an impressive job title when a perfectly good, and pleasantly old-fashioned, one exists. Sensible men and women should call housewives...housewives. Speak the word with liking and respect, really roll it around in the mouth, and relish the discomfort it produces in others. *Housewife.* Many women may not want to stay home and bake cookies. That's fine with me. But surely there can be more than patronizing respect—"You've certainly got your hands full!"—for mothers who do want this kind of life.

We need to show our daughters how admirable and richly rewarding it can be *not* to spend all day at the office. ◆



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Daddy Direst

David Eddie on being a stay-at-home dad

When my wife, Pam, announced she was pregnant one frosty January night, I hustled up a job as a radio producer so we wouldn't have to live in a refrigerator box during her maternity leave.

Until then, I'd been a stay-at-home novelist. The radio job was the best I ever had, as it turned out. The politics were brutal as usual, but the work itself was quite stimulating. My job was to book writers, profs, and sundry other pundits to weigh in on the issues of the day, and I was encouraged to read and know as much as possible, so if my boss walked by and I had my feet up on my desk, reading a novel, she would only say mildly, "How's the book coming, Dave?"

However, as the blob of protoplasm which was later to become our son Nicholas grew inside Pam's belly, we agreed on a series of near-Pythagorean truths: 1) She made more money than me; 2) She had ten years invested in her career as a broadcaster, whereas I had only a few months; 3) I wanted to be a writer, anyway; 4) We didn't want to put our child in day care. "I love him already," Pam would say, patting her belly. "I can't see handing him over to strangers after only a few months."

"I'll take care of him," I said. And with that, I, a man into whose bachelor dishpile an unlucky mouse once slipped and drowned, joined the growing ranks of househusbands and stay-at-home dads.

In many ways, it's been a good thing for me and for Pam. The jury's still out, though, on whether it's been a good thing for Nicholas. There's no doubt life with Dad is a tad more...rough and tumble than it might be with Mom. We call it "The Hong Kong Handover" when Pam turns him over to me for the day: He goes from the relatively decent, civilized world of Mom's rule to the backwards, corrupt

banana republic of Dad's regime. We live across from a mental health center in Toronto, and I've often pictured Nicholas writing in his memoirs, *Daddy Direst*: "I grew up in the shadow of an insane asylum. Since my mother was the primary breadwinner of our family, I was left to the tender mercies of my father, who took me to numerous bars, dipped my pacifier in his Bloody Marys, and allowed me to gnaw on the celery sticks. My first day-care center was a lingerie store. While other kids were playing with learning toys in a stimulating environment, I was darting in and out of the bra-and-panties-clad mannequins, playing peek-a-boo with the sales staff."

All true, I'm afraid. I often take Nicholas to my "local," Squirly's, but only for unavoidable business drinks, and we always sit in the non-smoking section. There's plenty of room to crawl around ("That was me Friday night," a patron said once as Nicholas windmilled by with his patented stiff-legged, no-knees crawling method.) He gets plenty of attention—the waitresses all love him, jounce him on their hips, change-purses jingling, and fashion little toys for him out of swizzle sticks, maraschino cherries, olives, and cocktail onions.

One day, my favorite bartender, Liz, inherited some money and opened a lingerie store called "Nearly Naked" right on my stroller route. Naturally I'd pop in to say "Hi" every now and then, and if I didn't she'd say sarcastically, "I saw you go by yesterday with Nicholas, but I guess you were *too busy* to stop in."

"O.K. I'll stop in more often," I told her. "But don't stare directly into his cuteness rays, or you may become zombified, your ovaries will sing 'The Battle Hymn of the Republic,' and you may no longer be mistress of your own will."

Thus I tried to warn her, but did she listen? Soon she stared up at me with pinwheel eyes. "Why don't you leave him here? You go...shop or whatever," she said, making a shooing motion with her hands. At first I demurred, but she insisted and I accepted. Which is how "Nearly Naked" became Nicholas's first day care.

It's a stimulating environment, I like to think. There's an old-fashioned barber chair with a foot pump that goes up and down, and an antique adding machine that makes a satisfying *ka-ching* sound when you pull the lever. Since most of Liz's clientele are women, he gets plenty of coochie-coochie attention. And of course it's far from unpleasant for me to loll

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around on the scallop-shaped chaise, flipping through *The History of Underwear,* discussing cleavage strategies and other matters of extreme importance with Liz's customers. And if I'm happy, he's happy, right? Babies pick up on vibes, as any parenting book will tell you, which is why it's important to look after not only them but yourself.

Or maybe that's all a big rationalization. Maybe I'm just being an old-fashioned BAD DAD. Maybe I'm not doing Nicholas any favors by staying home with him, allowing my mind to turn into mush and my body into a pear. Maybe I should abandon this whole gender-bending experiment, get a job already, and leave the care and feeding of Nicholas to a team of trained professionals…?

These doubts, fears, and guilts came to a head around the time Nicholas was about ten months old. I noticed that, whenever we were strollering through the park and he would spot another bundle about his size and shape (another kid, in other words), he would yell, clap, cough, anything to get the other kid's attention. Suddenly it dawned on me. *He's* bored of *me.* He's tired of hanging around his mouldy old Dad and wants to be with his age-mates.

By sinister coincidence, one of the best day-care facilities in the city is located in none other than the mental health center across the street. A couple of my friends have their kids there and sometimes, after dropping them off on their way to their exciting, stimulating careers, they'll stop by my house to brag and boast about how stimulated and socialized their kids are becoming, how quickly they're learning the language, etc. One day I voiced my concerns to one of them—that I might be doing Nicholas a disservice by staying home with him.

"Well, you know, Dave, I've found when I'm looking after my kids I often have another agenda, like sending a fax or whatever," this mother said. "Whereas at the day care it's all about the kid. The staff is really well trained, they have all these shelves full of 'learning toys.' There's even a disco ball on the ceiling!"

Learning toys? Disco ball? Meanwhile Nicholas—a possible budding Bertrand Russell—was playing with pots and pans on the filthy kitchen floor. And true! I often—make that almost always—have another agenda while I'm looking after him. Faxing, shopping (prancing and preening in front of three-way mirrors while Nicholas sucks his pacifier and stares at me with a look that says, "Dad, don't you realize it's just not about you anymore?"). I even tried to write while he played on the floor of my office (he quickly put a hob-nailed baby-bootie through that notion, however).

"Well, you know, Dave," another friend said on another day, "They did a study recently suggesting day care is better than a nanny, because it's more socializing and stimulating."

They did? We had a nanny, Audrey—seventy years old, Dutch, a lifelong caregiving professional—who came over two mornings a week so I could write. She was much better at looking after Nicholas than I was. She knew what ointments to rub on him where, and why; how to trick him into eating his savory goo when all he wanted to eat was his sweet goo, etc. And she appeared to love him in the bargain. So if day care was better than her, the hierarchy was: 1) Pam; 2) day care; 3) nanny; 4) Dave.

I'm aware of the studies comparing home care favorably with day care. I have one pinned to the wall of my office: LOTS OF LOVE GOOD FOR CHILD'S BRAIN, RESEARCHERS SAY. The problem for me, in terms of the justification of my existence, is they're all about "maternal separation," and dads get only the odd, joke mention. "The effects of maternal separation may be much more profound than we had imagined," the shrink in this study says, and such separation apparently causes brain cells in baby lab rats to die at an alarming rate. Even if Daddy rat stays home? But there's never any mention of Daddy rat.

I've only ever seen one study that seems to apply at all to my situation, but unfortunately it's horribly outdated—a 1959 study called "Love in Infant Monkeys." A team of researchers separated rhesus monkeys from their mothers only hours after birth and subjected them to a battery of tests. They found, among other things, that the infant monkeys grew extremely attached to a "cloth-covered mother substitute," and preferred it over a chicken-wire mother substitute, even when the chicken-wire mother was equipped with baby-bottle "breasts." They also found that when they put the baby monkeys in strange rooms full of strange objects with the cloth-covered mother-substitute, the monkey would check with the cloth mother, explore, check, and explore, and so on; whereas if they put it in alone, the baby monkey would crawl in a corner, put its hands over its head, and scream in distress.

So: I'm the cloth-covered mother substitute. In an attempt to alleviate my guilt over Nicholas's "socialization," I now take him to a drop-in center two or three times a week. It turns out, though, that even at age seventeen months, he's still too young to care much about other kids. And like an infant rhesus, if he falls or another kid tries to brain him with a toy truck, he cries and looks around the room. Where's Daddy? That looking-around-the-room business: that's all I need to see to know I'm doing the right thing, despite everything. ◆

David Eddie's first novel, Chump Change, *will be published by Riverhead Books in the spring of 1999.*

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They Make Such Lovely Pets

Children are the toy poodles of the 1990s, observes *Melinda Ledden Sidak*

That chronicle of the professional and well-heeled, *The New York Times Sunday Magazine*, recently featured a story about the unique problems faced by working mothers who travel frequently. Among others, it profiled Eileen Oswald, a wife and mother of two, who commutes every week from her suburban Chicago home to her company's headquarters in Norwalk, Connecticut.

Oswald manages the trade show division of a marketing and communications company. She says she works because she "likes to," not, evidently, because her husband is unable to support the family. During a typical week, the article said, Oswald leaves her house before dawn on Tuesday morning for Norwalk, where she stays in a hotel. She then returns to Chicago late Thursday night. Aside from commuting between two cities, she is frequently on the road. Oswald laments the emotional toll that her job takes on her family. Though she calls home frequently and tries to "overcompensate" with her children while she's with them, that "doesn't remove the tremendous guilt" she says she feels for being

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away much of the time. And indeed, her life does sound harrowing. During the interview in her Connecticut office, Oswald received a frightened call from her baby-sitter who told her that her eleven-year-old son had not gotten off the schoolbus that day or called home. Eventually the boy was located playing with a neighborhood friend, but not before reducing his mother to a long-distance wreck.

While Eileen Oswald's situation may be unusual, in that she commutes to a distant state for her job, her story is typical in other ways. Hardly a week goes by without a newspaper or magazine feature about guilt-ridden moms of the Nineties, heroically coping with their careers, needy children, and housework-challenged husbands, not to mention chronic sleep deprivation. Although one may admire the sheer physical stamina of women like Oswald, my initial reaction to such stories of maternal angst is always the same: Eileen, why didn't you get a cocker spaniel?

Given the finite number of hours in the day, it seems curious that so many busy professionals do not consider the ease, practicality, and warm companionship of a dog or cat rather than the insatiable demands of children. Nevertheless, most professionals apparently do not consider a pet to be an acceptable substitute for Brendan and Caitlin. As a practical matter, however, Brendan and Caitlin quite often end up as substitutes themselves—for Fido and Fluffy. You've heard of couples who treat their dogs as surrogate children? Welcome to the late-twentieth century, where couples treat their children as surrogate pets.

The typical parents of the child-as-pet are employed full-time in demanding jobs and spend the bulk of their time at work. In the evenings and sometimes on the weekends, there are a few brief hours to eat, sleep, do chores, and occasionally, to consume leisure. During those all-too-brief periods available for enjoyment, these parents spend "quality time" playing with and caring for their children just as pet owners will toss the ball for Fido or take him for a run. Moreover, both children and pets afford the tired adults a few moments each day of unconditional love—perhaps a wet kiss and some slobbering devotion to make up for the way their boss reamed them out that week over their late assignment.

When they don't have time to care for Junior personally, which is, in fact, most of the time, they have to hire a baby-sitter to do the job for them, just as Fido's owner will hire a professional dog walker and pet-sitter. If they can't afford the personal, in-home touch, they can just drop Junior off at the kennel—er, day-care center. From the office, they then arrange by telephone for the dog-sitter to take Fido to the vet and the groomer, and for the baby-sitter to take Junior to the doctor and to soccer practice. The parent loves Junior, just as Fido's owner loves Fido. But neither would dream of sacrificing important personal and professional aspirations because Fido and Junior would like more quality time at the park.

Like the pampered poodles and Yorkshire terriers of rich society women, which exist primarily as extensions and reflections of their owners' personalities, so can the child-as-pet function as a means of flaunting affluence or projecting a particular image of oneself. The poodle child has been realized in its highest form in the offspring of single-mother celebrities like Madonna and supermodel Elle MacPherson. Media stories about such celebrities typically characterize the baby not as an individual, but as a new vehicle for the mother's self-expression.

Actress Jodie Foster recently announced, for example, that she is expecting a baby in September. *Newsweek* cutely described Foster's impending motherhood as "her next production," and explained that, "Foster already has a Yale degree and two Oscars; what else was left?" Similarly, one close friend explained to *People* that after all of the actress' many successes, "there were only two challenges left: 'I guess she could be President if she wanted to,' he says, But since politics doesn't seem a top priority, 'it is the most natural thing in the world that she will be a mother.'"

The unimportance and even irrelevance of the child's own needs and interests, separate and apart from the mother's, are made plain by the treatment of fathers as an optional accessory. The Foster stories go so far as to indicate that a father, like power windows or a sun roof, would be nice to have, and that in his absence other family members and friends are needed to pitch in. But his role is largely envisioned as helper of Jodie, not as someone who provides his own distinct and vital contribution to a child's upbringing and emotional security. Earlier this year, in a *Vanity Fair* cover story on Madonna and her out-of-wedlock daughter, the rock star described the importance of fathers this way: "Sometimes you want to look over at somebody and say, 'What do *you* think we should do?'"

It's equally revealing that stories about professional moms, like articles about celebrity single mothers, are always told from the woman's perspective—*her* guilt, *her* feelings, *her* needs—and never from the children's. In her response to the

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Times story, syndicated columnist Kathleen Parker observed, "Spare us the statements of angst-filled moms like this woman [quoted in the story]: 'There's nothing worse,' she says, 'than sitting on a runway, realizing you won't be home in time for your child's play at school.' Yes there is. Worse is being a child who knows his mother can't make it to his school play."

THERE USED TO be a quaint notion that parents were morally obliged to make personal sacrifices for the benefit of their children. Thus, for example, society once felt so strongly about the importance of a two-parent, stable home to a child's well-being that unmarried expectant couples were pressured into shotgun weddings, and unhappily married couples were pressured to "stay together for the sake of the children." Unwed mothers, of course, were treated as objects of shame, and encouraged to give their babies up for adoption.

Those social arrangements had a distinct downside: They created a lot of miserable adults. Society's cost-benefit equation, however, assumed that unhappy adults—who, after all, bear some responsibility for the situations in which they find themselves—were not as important as unhappy children.

Today, the equation has been reversed. There are no stories about single celebrities who courageously decide to set aside their own desire for a little companion ahead of the would-be little companion's need for a father. Nor do we read many positive stories about couples with intense career demands who decide *not* to have children because they believe responsible childrearing requires more time than they have to spare. And why should we? Children have become commodities like everything else—highly valued in certain ways, but commodities nonetheless. As Carolyn Graglia, author of the 1998 book, *Domestic Tranquility*, has observed, "When a mother who chooses to [work] says that she is very particular about the nanny she hires because her baby is the most precious thing in her life, she puts a distinct gloss on the word 'precious.' Her costly oriental rug, which is valuable, pleasing to sight and touch, and completes the furnishing of her home, might also be called 'precious,' but it does not take up much of her time. Neither does her baby, for it is her job to which she has chosen to devote the bulk of her personal attention."

In one way, the old radical feminist critique of the traditional family and motherhood was correct. The sacrifices that childrearing demands of a woman are often incompatible with her success as a professional in the marketplace. For that reason, early radical feminist theoreticians like Simone de Beauvoir actively sought to discourage women from marrying and having children in order to pursue other goals. But the natural feminine urge to have babies cannot so easily be suppressed. Mainstream feminism therefore sought a compromise by promoting the idea that women can "have it all."

Work and family can be combined successfully in some instances. For example, many women make substantial professional sacrifices by choosing home-based or part-time employment, or by taking a career break while their children are young. But it is simply not wise or practical for a woman after she's had children to pursue an all-encompassing, full-time career in the same way she did before becoming a mother.

The assertions that children are better off at home with their mothers, and, more shockingly, that mothers may have an obligation to make sacrifices—or at least reasonable accommodation—for their children continue to be met with hysterical accusations of wanting to "turn back the clock." But it in no way limits our legal rights if we ask, as a society, that both women and men make choices that reflect their obligations to others as well as to themselves.

Although some women have no financial alternative other than to work, for those who do, devoting the bulk of their time to their children instead of the marketplace should not be seen as a "luxury"—it is a basic necessity that we can and should afford. Instead of exalting two-career couples that "successfully" juggle the competing demands of children and work, we could lavish praise on two-career couples who consciously choose to forgo the pleasures of having children because they believe a young child needs one parent at home, and they are unable or unwilling to do that happily.

Instead of celebrating single mothers like Jodie Foster or Madonna, we could reserve our enthusiasm, say, for a divorced woman in her late thirties who heroically decides to forgo selfish single motherhood in favor of working with underprivileged children. And instead of sympathizing with Eileen Oswald's guilt and admiring her apparent superhuman energy and endurance, we could, for example, encourage and applaud her should she decide to take a less demanding job closer to home in Chicago.

As for all those would-be Jodies and Eileens out there, all I can say is please, *please* visit your local animal shelter. There's a cuddly puppy or kitty waiting just for you. ◆

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You Are Not My Kid's Mom

Diane Fisher explodes the myth of "quality" day care

Women are "working increasingly long hours without the supports such as reliable, affordable child care that could help counterbalance those work demands." So opined a recent *Washington Post* news story, but really the sentence could have appeared almost anywhere. It's one of the dogmas of modern life that mothers would be able to work "increasingly long hours"—without detriment to themselves or their children—if only the government would just get on the stick and provide better day care. It's a dogma, but it's not true. There is simply no evading the vast difference between parents and providers, between even the highest-quality care and a real home.

Whenever day-care centers are criticized, day-care advocates respond, "Well, that's because they're low-quality. That's why we're asking for more funding!" But the problems of day care go far beyond the matter of "quality." It is simply unethical of day-care advocates to dismiss serious concerns such as the reasonable age for children to begin full-time day-care or the importance of a mother staying with babies as much as possible during those critical first three years, or the risks of ten-hour day-care days for any child under five.

But they do dismiss these concerns, and usually there is nobody to contradict them. Academics, pediatricians, and other experts have learned to keep a prudent silence about the risks of day care, and so it is the day-care advocates—and *only* the advocates—we hear from on our television screens and in our parenting magazines.

Many of these advocates will in private candidly concede a gap between their personal values, or "what they choose for their own children," and what they endorse professionally. But in public, you hear only the most unblinking industry loyalty. One supervisor of a national chain of centers, who would only speak off the record, said, "I would never publicly say anything negative about day care."

Well, that's business. But is the public aware that day care is a business? Parents are encouraged to perceive day-care spokesmen as true child advocates, who can be trusted to eval-

Drawing by Yuri Kolyadenko

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uate the effects of day care on children objectively. Parents are led to believe that day-care providers have taken some kind of day-care Hippocratic oath, like physicians. In fact, day-care professionals will be the first to tell you that they are market-driven. When asked how centers decide on the hours of service provided—whether there is not such a thing as too many hours of day care—one director commented, "we have to provide what the market demands." Several admitted that this often presented conflict between what was best for the child, what the parents wanted, and what pleased the corporate day-care headquarters.

Other day-care providers choose to bridge the gap between the interests of children and the desires of adults by stoutly denying that any such gap exists. In discussing infants in full-time care, a young day-care supervisor, with a degree in early childhood education, assured me, "They all benefit from the socialization, no matter how young they are." This particular chain accepts infants as young as six weeks. She added, a little ominously it seemed to me, that it was best to start children as "young as possible" so they're "used to it." "Children who start later," she concluded, "have greater trouble adjusting."

PARENTS WHO USE institutional day care sometimes justify their decision by repeating this claim that children need the socialization and stimulation ordinary parents can't provide. But they ought not to delude themselves about how much stimulation a child can get when one young teacher must struggle to entertain eight toddlers. I once observed a teacher brightly quizzing squirming, climbing three-year-olds about the "animals of the rainforest." One of them, Jake, was engrossed watching fish swimming in the aquarium tank. "Jake?" the teacher asked cheerily, "Can you think of a rain-forest animal?" Jake continued his reverie. A mother might talk to Jake about the fish, or let him watch them, or do something else to adapt herself to her child. But it's impossible for an entire group to switch activities just because one child is in the mood for "aquarium time." The children nap when the schedule says nap, snack when the schedule says snack, are stimulated when the schedule calls for them to be stimulated. How else could one cope with them all? The needs of the group, of the certified program posted on the wall, must dominate.

Which is how it happens that a visitor to an infant center can see well-meaning teachers of three- and four-month-old babies counting and naming animals in books, months—years even—before these children could possibly benefit from such an exercise. Infants need attachment and love, gentle long sequences of playing and responding back and forth, not counting and labeling. But how would one post *that* curriculum on the wall?

Readers who are mothers should reflect on how you knew when it was time to change a diaper. Busy caregivers change diapers according to bulletin board schedules. How much connection and interaction with the children can these caregivers have, no matter how well-paid, how well-educated, or how well-motivated they may be? It's not their fault. They are moving from task to task throughout the day, and their quality-assurance record depends upon it. But the kind of attention babies need to thrive—*that* they can never deliver, no matter what the paperwork says.

For instance, I take my rambunctious two-year-old to preschool story-time at the local library, along with many other mothers and children. Our children sit in our laps. We help them follow the song, guide stubby fingers, and soothe them when they crank up too fast. We ask at story-time's end, "Shall we stop to get some books about spring? Shall we ask Sarah if she'd like to play? Are you too tired for the park?" The decisions at least in part depend upon the child. A group of children from a "quality" day-care center also come on an "outing" to the library story-time. The children line up on the floor, sitting on their coats. The providers tote the babies in carriers. The preschoolers do the motions and sing the songs by themselves, sometimes glancing back at the providers for a reassuring smile. At the end, they line up again, put their coats on, and proceed back to the day-care van to return to the center for lunch. Are these two groups having equal experiences?

At story-time it is easy to see that neither group of children is having significant interactions with their peers. Pre-schoolers are interested in and enjoy other children, but it is adults to whom they still look for learning and emotional security. Experts agree it is not until eighteen months and older that children engage in any true interactive play. Even two-year-olds are able to tolerate real peer interaction for only limited periods before they become overstimulated.

And that's just what you see in under-three day care. The children only sporadically play with each other. They mill about individually, climbing over each other like puppies to get to a toy or to the adult. Children learn to see the world through the eyes of an adult they love. Claims that infants

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can be socialized by other infants, that preschoolers can bond with their peers for ten hours a day, should be tossed where they belong: in the garbage. A senior day-care worker confided to me that, "babies have no business in day care."

There is also a falsely upbeat style and tone to day care that is grating. Providers habitually smile and talk in positive, animated tones. Lights are always bright. Toys and bodies spill everywhere. Toddlers may be delighted for an hour, even two, but the day wears on and on. The pace of an individual child's day, the sorrow or wonder, all delicacy of feeling and reflection, is lost in the steamroller of the curriculum-driven day. Story after story, rhyme after rhyme, line up, run outside, potty, snack...through it all, one senses most of these children are quite alone. They may be happy, resilient, and adaptable...but still alone. They must long for a gentle moment, for just a second of eye-to-eye soulful connection, but how can these besieged caregivers provide that?

The workers are here on overlapping shifts from six in the morning to six at night or even longer. The best centers take pride in their one-to-four ratio of providers to children, but this ratio still means that infants interact with several caregivers during the day. The mystery of an individual child's unfolding inner experience, the miracle of time with an adult who loves you is replaced with the relentless cheerfulness that has led so many of us to hate Barney.

America suffers a growing national epidemic of parental absence and disconnection. "Quality" in day care cannot solve the problem. It does not even address it. One consistent finding in the much-cited, ongoing National Institutes of Health (NIH) study has been that even the best day care cannot compensate for too much parental absence. How much separation, then, is too much? Don't expect the day-care providers to answer that question. Parents who overuse day care, remember, are their best customers. An embattled veteran provider says, "If we were open longer, some of these parents would drop them off longer." Another described children who were left at six in the morning "with a Nutri-Grain bar or bag of Cheerios in their hands for breakfast," and not picked up until 6:00 P.M. when the center closed.

Day-care advocates deny that they have any influence upon parents' conduct. ("We don't encourage day-care consumption. We merely provide options.") And yet our culture now leads young parents to assume that they can put newborns in full-time care and that it will benefit their babies. We have a White House conference urging more and better day care. Where is the White House conference on the Nutri-Grain breakfast, or the ten-hour days, or the six-week-olds in full-time care?

And how do ordinary parents know when their children are suffering? When children are compliant, follow rules, interact well with peers, and express very little at home, we conclude the child is doing fine. The most recent installment of the NIH study reported that children in center-based care were less likely to have "behavior problems." This was widely interpreted as great news. One provider I interviewed recalled a four-year-old girl who would regularly meet her rushed mother at the center's door after a long day of separation, not with a hug or a sigh, but with a cool gaze and, "Well! Let's go to McDonald's!" What an independent, forward thinker! But where we once cherished our children's love, dependency, and innocence, we now value their premature self-sufficiency and detachment.

How will we balance the marketplace and children's needs? For the past two decades, we have not balanced them at all: Work must come first, children second. With what consequences? We won't really know until the first generation of day-care babies become adults themselves. By then it may be too late. As Dr. Stanley Greenspan, the George Washingon University professor who until recently served as director of the Clinical Infant Development program at the NIH, puts it, "We are still in a position to actively choose which direction to go in. [But] if we wait too long to choose our direction, future generations may well lack the self-reflectiveness necessary to be aware of what is missing and to determine what collective actions are necessary."

Whatever happened to rocking chairs, whispered songs, soft blankets, and dim lights? Are we just arguing aesthetics? Or is this the Brave New World? One day I observed a caregiver cradling a baby horizontally at her waist, swinging her gently in an attempt to induce sleep. The overhead fluorescent fixtures, the cacophony of other toddlers, the swaddling in a blanket discarded a moment ago by someone else—somehow it didn't seem conducive to slumber. As she stood rocking in the midst of the bright noisy room, the caregiver looked at me ruefully and said, "She's fighting it!" And well she should. ◆

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What Crisis?

There is no shortage of day care, reports *Darcy Olsen.* Just ask parents

The President and First Lady repeatedly speak about the alarming child-care crisis facing the nation's parents. The White House convened a special conference on the subject last fall, and in January the President proposed a $22 billion child-care plan that would expand four federal programs and start five new ones. Not wanting to be outdone on the public-relations front, the Republican-controlled Senate Budget Committee endorsed a resolution in March that would give tax relief to parents who pay for child care.

Yet no matter which plan triumphs in the end, the crisis politicians are scurrying to address does not in fact exist. According to the best available data from the Department of Health and Human Services, fully ninety-six percent of parents nationwide say they are satisfied with their current child-care arrangements. No wonder the White House calls this a "silent" crisis.

Most families, in fact, pay nothing for child care, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. More than half of all pre-schoolers are still cared for primarily by their parents. Among parents who use child care, half of all arrangements do not require a cash payment. Many parents, for example, rely on relatives who rarely charge for care. For those who do pay, the average weekly expenditure on child care for families below the poverty level is $50. Families above poverty pay $76. Is that too much or too little? Nine out of ten parents say they would be willing to pay more for their current child-care arrangements.

Nor is affordable child care scarce. In fact, there is roughly a twelve percent vacancy rate in child-care centers, a figure that is constant across urban, suburban, and rural areas. That figure does not include the estimated one million non-regulated, family day-care providers, forty percent of whom say they have room for more children. In short, "The market seems to be working to increase supply as demand expands," according to a 1991 Department of Education child-care study.

Employers and unions also help families arrange child care. For example, more than half of all families report having an employee benefit or policy that helps them manage child-care responsibilities. Employer assistance can include anything from an on-site center to direct subsidies. Dozens of unions have established child-care programs for their workers, including the United Auto Workers, United Steel Workers, Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union, and the International Ladies Garment Workers Union.

Studies also show that any shortages are a consequence of local regulatory requirements. In Washington, D.C., for instance, it is illegal for two families to share a nanny or a sitter without becoming embroiled in a regulatory nightmare. If two families want to share a sitter, the home in which the

 Detail from a woodcut by John Held, Jr.

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care would take place automatically becomes designated a "child-development facility," subject to all District rules and regulations for traditional child-care facilities. Like a commercial child-care center, the family's home would need to be licensed and regularly inspected. The family would also need to meet the same requirements as a child-care business for space, toys, and food preparation. The sitter, too, would be subject to provider licensing and training laws. Moreover, most city zoning commissions consider day care a small business and prohibit programs from opening in residential areas. These prohibitions can extend even to individuals who wish to use their own homes to care for neighborhood children. These regulations make care less affordable and less available than it would otherwise be.

So if parents are not demanding a federal child-care plan, then who is?

According to Rep. George Miller (D-Calif.), who worked to pass a similar child-care proposal ten years ago, the child-care movement is the creation of unions and day-care advocates. "The fact is that I spent eight years in getting the child-care bill passed in Congress, and at its zenith, there was never a child-care movement in the country. There was a coalition of child-advocacy groups, and a few large international unions that put up hundreds of thousands of dollars, and we created in the mind of the leadership of Congress that there was a child-care movement. But there was nobody riding me. And not one of my colleagues believed that their election turned on it for a moment. There wasn't a parents' movement."

Not much has changed in the past ten years. The *New York Times* recently reported that ten New York City labor unions are lobbying state officials to spend $200 million to subsidize more child-care slots, build more day-care centers, and increase the wages of child-care workers. Why? According to reporter Steven Greenhouse, "One aim of the plan is to pay child-care workers and have more of them join unions." Union bosses also said that AFL-CIO child-care centers would serve to integrate unions more into the lives of workers.

ALONGSIDE THESE UNIONS, there are a handful of other organizations leading the charge for government-funded day care. Those groups include the Children's Defense Fund, the National Association for the Education of Young Children, and the Child Care Action Campaign. All of these groups publicly endorsed Clinton's child-care plan at a press conference in January.

It doesn't matter to these advocates that their agenda does not coincide with the wishes of the majority of American parents: Polls conducted by the Families and Work Institute show that nearly seven out of ten parents report wanting to spend more time with their children. Many other polls support that finding.

Yet ignoring parents is not an oversight. Advocates dismiss parents' views because they believe parents are incapable of figuring out what is best for their children. As Hillary Clinton put it, "Many parents do not know what to look for when choosing child care. They often overlook important measures of quality, such as basic safety requirements, the experience and training of child-care workers, and whether the setting is appropriate for the child's stage of development.... [They] don't know what is quality. If somebody's nice to them, it doesn't matter that [this person doesn't] know the difference between caring for a one-year-old or a four-year-old."

The research from the Department of Health and Human Services shows, however, that parents are well-informed consumers of child care. Unlike the administration, parents do not have one universal definition of "quality care." Some parents judge quality according to how warm, loving, reliable, and experienced a provider is. Those parents will often choose a relative or family-based care for their children. Other parents see quality as linked to educational opportunities, and they are more likely to choose center-based care. However parents define quality, most say it is more important than cost or convenience when selecting child care.

Conjuring up a child-care crisis, however, gives both liberals and conservatives an opportunity to dictate to parents how to raise their children: whether it's subsidizing more federal day care or subsidizing stay-at-home mothers. Yet the best resolution Congress could adopt would be to stand back and allow parents, not politicians, to determine what is best for their children. Only parents are equipped to make decisions about what sort of care their children need.

If politicians insist on doing something for children, they should simply cut taxes. Reducing taxes would help parents to be able to spend more time with their children, afford better child care, or do whatever it is they think best for their families. Letting moms and dads keep more of their hard-earned money would certainly benefit children more than another unwanted entitlement program. ◆

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Day-Care Capital

Maybe the reason why more Republicans don't oppose day care is because many of them use it, reports *Kathryn Jean Lopez*

You would think that the day-care issue would be a no-brainer for Republicans. A politically damaged President proposes a $22 billion plan to put more of the nation's children into state-regulated care. Polls show Americans don't want it. Just say no, right? But many Republicans in Congress won't say no. And that's not just because of the usual Republican squeamishness about "women's" issues. Many Republicans support day care because they use it.

Picture this: It's 8:30 Monday morning. The first item on the Congressman's or staffer's agenda? Dropping off his toddler at the U. S. House of Representatives Child-Care Center. The center, located in the dreary shadows of the smoke stacks of the Capitol's power plant, is the daily warehouse for kids of members and congressional staff. The Senate has its own child-care center, in a gated compound on an island across from the Senate parking lot. This is where forty-seven children of Senate employees find themselves between 7:30 A.M. and 6:45 P.M.

Within the ambitious circles of the Beltway, the world of stay-at-home moms and families cutting costs to keep their kids at home seems very far away. But on Capitol Hill, even staunch conservatives now lead untraditional lives and have bought the politically correct line on day care. If a male Republican's office is not being run by career-minded women, he is probably married to one. When you ask younger Capitol Hill staff, most don't know too many stay-at-home mothers. One expects a Hillary Clinton or Madeleine Albright to take institutional day care as an unquestionable good (Albright told *Vogue* that when her twins came home after two months in a hospital incubator, she "kind of sat there during the day, feeding them, watching soap operas, and thought, I didn't go to college for this"). But even female Republican politicans, such as Nancy Johnson (Conn.) and Sue Kelly (N.Y.), who both stayed home during their children's early years, are leading the way toward more federalization of child care. One Republican staffer told me matter-of-factly, "Many mothers are just not good mothers. Kids are safer in day care than at home."

Few will forget the touching sight of Rep. Bill Paxon cradling his new-

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born daughter, Susan Ruby, at the 1996 Republican National Convention while mommy Susan Molinari gave the keynote speech. But that seems to have been a rare bit of quality time for the little girl, who is now almost two years old and a regular in the House child-care center. When Susan Ruby began catching colds and ear infections during the day, her parents started sending her there with pieces of plastic in her ears to avoid new germs.

The congressional centers are run "by the book," their administrators say. Officials call them "first-rate," and will repeatedly, without prompting, assure a visitor that the facilities meet all guidelines from the National Academy for Early Childhood Programs. However, even a day-care advocate's heart would break to see the little red-haired boy I watched in of one of the House center's rooms, rocking back and forth alone in a sea of toys, while staring at the corner wall. Or the boy I remember passing one cold day last winter, who stood in the backyard of the Senate center, holding on to the wire fence, looking longingly at the traffic.

The costs for housing children in these facilities are also very reasonable. For just $909 a month, House employees can drop off children as young as two months old every day at 8:30 A.M. for as long as eleven hours in the care of workers, provided the parents leave their infants with a sufficient supply of food for the day. Older kids go into the center armed with lunch and often the breakfast it was too early to eat at home.

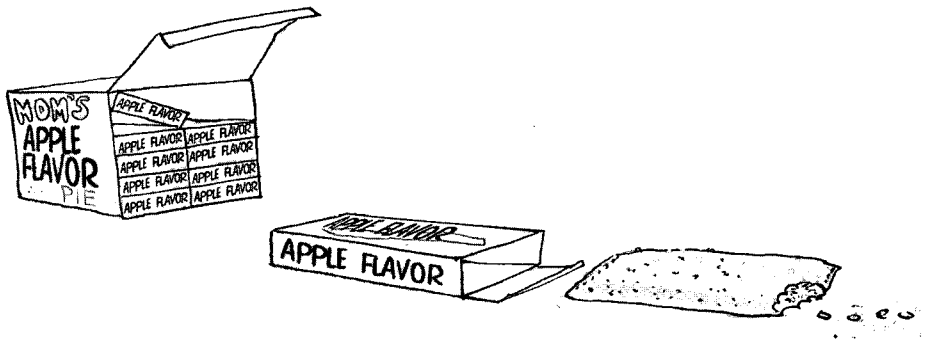
Alas for busy Senate staff, their current center does not provide care for infants and is smaller than the House facility. This no doubt feeds a Senator's suspicion that there is a "child care crisis" going on in the country: The center lists thirty children waiting for spaces. But that crisis—so far as it affects the Hill—will be resolved shortly. Senate children will be moved into a new facility toward the end of this year. According to the center's director, Shirley Letourneau, when the center opened in 1984, it was only meant to be a temporary location. In fact, it has already been there four years longer than had been originally anticipated. There are practical reasons it needs to move, including temperature control and electricity problems. But the biggest difference is that it will now be able to upgrade to a "full-service" day-care center, which includes space for infants.

Of course, there are conservative mothers who quit their jobs on the Hill to be with their small children. Some female staff work out flexible part-time schedules, which often allow them to work from home. But as a rule, stay-at-home moms are not socially acceptable inside most Beltway circles. The Department of Labor reports that sixty-seven percent of all mothers of school-age children in the Washington metropolitan area work outside the home. As Marian Gormley, of the national organization Mothers at Home, said, in a city "that stresses success based on paychecks and job titles, I'm the only mother on my block at home during the day." These social attitudes, some staffers say off the record, are one reason why the likes of Representative Johnson "can kill us" when it comes to the debate over increasing the federalization of child care.

And it leads to added pressure upon those Capitol Hill moms who do quit their jobs to practice what they preach. Christi Shortridge, formerly a Republican House aide, who has worked out a part-time schedule with the Heritage Foundation in order to stay home with her baby daughter, says she often gets calls from congressmen who want her to come in to do work for them.

Even conservatives, it seems, want a village to raise their kids. ◆

Kathryn Jean Lopez is an editorial associate at National Review.



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IRS to Moms: Don't Try This At Home

Anita K. Blair explains how women could better combine motherhood with work—if only the government would let them

It's no sin for a mother to try to combine work and motherhood in a manner convenient to herself and her family. But chances are there's a law against it.

Most mothers want more time with their children, and that translates into less time at work. Superwomen want to cut back to mere mortals' hours; full-time workers would prefer flex-time or part-time; and wage earners would rather be their own bosses and set their own hours and level of commitment.

Let's say you work a regular forty-hour week and want an occasional afternoon off for family reasons without taking annual leave. You approach your boss and offer to come in early and work through lunch the following week to make up for your time off this week. "Can't do it," says your boss. And he's right—it's the law. The federal Fair Labor Standards Act requires employers to pay overtime anytime an employee works more than eighty hours in a two-week period. Congress has tried to amend this law, dating back to the 1930s, to allow employers and employees to organize shifts by mutual agreement. But President Clinton won't sign it because the labor unions won't let him. Tough luck, Mom.

"Fine," you say, "how about if I reduce my work hours by job-splitting?" Again, federal laws force your employer to pay extra for your convenience. You pay part of your payroll taxes (such as social security or FICA)

 Drawing by Paul Barker

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through paycheck deductions, but your employer also contributes a similar amount on your behalf, not deducted from your salary. Sometime during the year your earnings may reach the maximum annual amount subject to FICA. Thereafter you and your employer don't owe FICA for the remainder of the year. But if the same salary were split between two workers, doing the same work previously done by one, neither might reach the maximum, or both might reach it much later, and the employer would be stuck making matching contributions much longer.

Employment benefit plans are strictly regulated, too, and generally require employers to treat all workers alike. If a company offers insurance or other benefits to any part-time employees, it would have to give them to job-splitters. Job-sharing becomes unattractively expensive when it means paying extra benefits for the second worker.

There are other disadvantages to allowing employees to share jobs. Many federal laws exempt "small" businesses, usually defined by the number of employees. It's just foolish for a small business to enlarge itself and subject itself to potential claims under, for example, the Americans with Disabilities Act, purely for the sake of letting people share jobs.

"Okay," you say, "I won't be an employee at all; I'll be a consultant." As an independent contractor you would be responsible for withholding and paying your own taxes, including self-employment taxes. But so might any company that engages you. The problem is that the Internal Revenue Service regulations defining "independent contractor" remain so vague and overbroad that no one who hires you can ever be sure that the IRS won't claim you were, in fact, an employee. Firms that use independent contractors risk big, expensive—and often groundless and unfair—battles with the IRS.

"Okay, fine," you say, "I'll prove I'm an independent contractor by setting up a home office." Uh-oh. If you decide to deduct your home-office expenses, experts say you're inviting a tax audit. Tom Herman, the "Home Office" columnist in the *Wall Street Journal*, explains: "The law is so limiting and complex that tax advisers say it's natural for IRS agents to assume they can get more revenue from some home-office users." A new law is supposed to help, but it won't go into effect until 1999.

One more thing: Whatever you do, don't succeed. If you have to expand your business, you'll face, as an employer, the problems mentioned above. If you need capital, pray your banker makes loans based on business considerations, not race or sex. If you're forced to rely on the big affirmative-action lender, the federal Small Business Administration, you'll find the application process similar to Chinese water torture.

Despite these roadblocks, millions of women keep trying to achieve a balance between family and work. They are aided by wonderful gadgets like the PC, fax, and portable phone, and great inventions like E-mail and the Internet. But they are regularly thwarted by their own government. The simple truth is, your government wants you out of your home, every day, working and paying taxes to the max. Who loves ya, Baby? Bill Clinton or Bill Gates? ◆

Anita K. Blair is Executive Vice President and General Counsel of the Independent Women's Forum. As a corporate lawyer for more than fifteen years, she has worked with hundreds of family-operated businesses.

It May Not Be Destiny, But....

Biology determines our roles more than we like to admit, says *Mona Charen*

Lying on the fertility specialist's examining table, her legs in stirrups while her husband's sperm was injected through a tube directly into her uterus, writer Anne Taylor Fleming began to wonder whether her feminist heroines had betrayed her. At age thirty-five, she was a successful journalist. But she spent most of her days on the Los Angeles freeways, ferrying sperm to the clinic that had become the repository of her fondest dreams and fiercest desires. The nights she spent in tears.

Motherhood, which she had firmly, even jauntily, rejected as a young married feminist in the early 1970s, cruelly mocked her in the mid- and late-1980s by becoming the overwhelming obsession and elusive goal of her life. In her heedless, revolutionary youth, the diaphragm was, as she wrote in her bitter memoir of infertility, *Motherhood Deferred,* "not only a fixed part of my body, but a fixed part of my mind." Hadn't Simone de Beauvoir, Germaine Greer, and the rest freed women from

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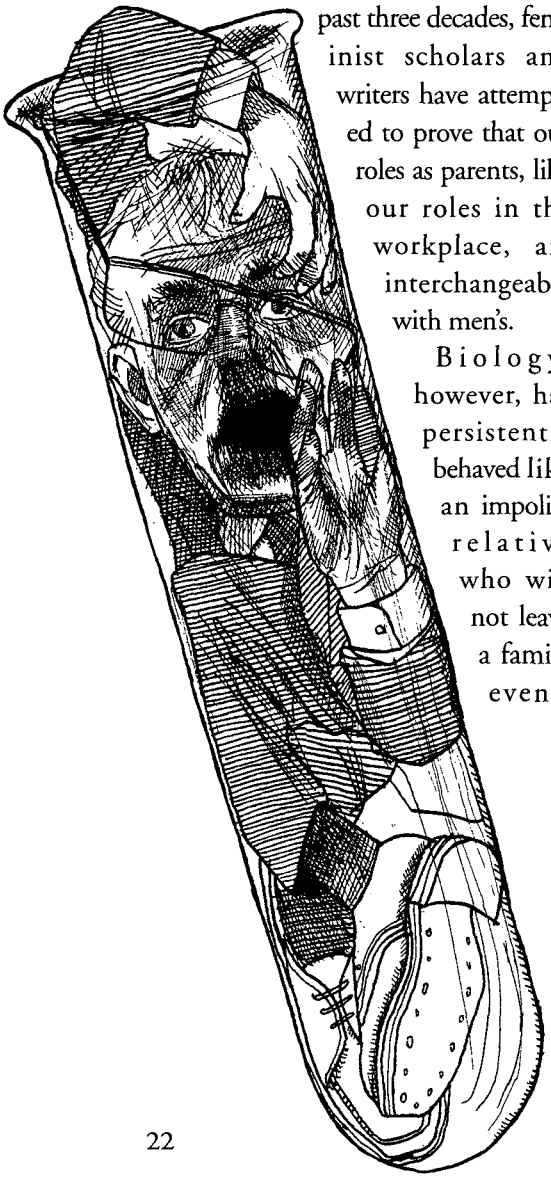
motherhood? Yet later, when youth was past and the deep bass strings of her nature began to tremble with baby lust, she could not conceive. Years of sex without procreation gave way to years of attempts at procreation without sex. Finally she gave up, having recognized, belatedly, the mysterious, compelling, and irreversible ways our biology is tied up with our destiny, in ways we cannot always foresee.

Feminism has been at war with human nature from the beginning, and nowhere more so than in its fierce campaign against motherhood. Babies and children, feminists rightly perceive, are what make women's lives dramatically, unalterably different from men's. For the past three decades, feminist scholars and writers have attempted to prove that our roles as parents, like our roles in the workplace, are interchangeable with men's.



Biology, however, has persistently behaved like an impolite relative who will not leave a family event. For example, a Harvard Medical School study reported in 1997 that women undergoing infertility treatments had levels of depression comparable to patients with AIDS and cancer. Alas, it isn't social conditioning that makes women grieve this way. It is written into our DNA.

And when the burning urge to become a mother is fulfilled, other natural and deeply ingrained traits in women assert themselves. Fierce protectiveness, utter unselfishness, and surprising patience surface in all but the most pathological women. The gravitational urge to be close to one's children is something few men experience, but few mothers deny. Millions of modern women scan books like *What to Expect When You're Expecting*, and accept the notion that because they are pregnant, they will experience a "nesting urge" around the eighth or ninth month of pregnancy.

Nonetheless, many of the same women who accept biological differences between the sexes when they're pregnant still swallow the feminist myth that once the baby is born, there aren't—or shouldn't be—any innate differences between the roles of mother and father. Despite the downright primitive state to which women are reduced in the year following the birth of a baby—nursing and nurturing and caring for the infant—women persist in believing that men are adequate maternal substitutes. To acknowledge that motherhood is different from fatherhood is profoundly threatening to the modern, egalitarian style of parenting. Dad is just as good at giving a bottle, wiping away tears, and changing a diaper as Mom is at picking up a briefcase and going out the door to the office. Right?

Not really. Just as very few men experience infertility in the shattering way women do, it should come as no surprise that when men and women do become parents, they differ in their reactions and approach to parenthood.

A father's unique contribution to child rearing as a man is tampered with only at great risk. David Blankenhorn, author of *Fatherless America*, observed that when a mother and father are watching a child at play on a jungle gym, the mother will likely be the one to say "Be careful!" and the father to say, "See if you can get to the top." Fathers challenge; mothers coddle. Of course fathers hug, console kids after a spill, and apply Band-aids—just as mothers do. But they are simply inferior to women in the nurturing role. They will change a diaper—but usually long after the point a mother would have noticed that it's wet or dirty. They cannot tell the difference between a baby's hunger and the need to burp. They will dress a toddler for summer in January. They have a preternatural ability to sleep through the sounds of midnight wailing (though they may be more alert to the awakening of an older child). Fathers are less likely than mothers to notice loose shoelaces, sharp objects within reach, and worrisome fevers.

These disabilities on the part of fathers are shrugged off by wives because a) they love their husbands; and b) they understand that fathers perform functions that mothers don't. Psychologists who study infants have found that babies seem to expect more play from their fathers and more cuddling from their mothers as early as six weeks of age. A father's play is a key part of a child's development. It helps to stretch the child's abilities as well as instill self-control. But a mother's hovering presence is critical as well. Fathers sometimes scare little ones by being a bit too realistic in their growling—who

Drawing by John Springs SPRING 1998

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hasn't seen a toddler dissolve in tears when Dad was just pretending? A minute on Mommy's shoulder and all is well. There is also research to suggest that the best mothers are the most reassuring and comforting—not the most stimulating.

In his book, Blankenhorn recounts a mother's story about the theft of her daughter's bicycle: "My daughter was about seven," the woman says. "We had just bought her a brand new bike. My daughter went outside and the bike was gone. Meanwhile a little boy down the street also said his bike was taken. My husband goes in his van right to where the kids [thieves] were and knocked them off the bikes and they ran. I mean everybody, the whole neighborhood, knew what my husband had done....I would have said, 'Well maybe we can get you a new one later on....'"

Even in the age of cyberspace, the natural strength of fathers is required from time to time. Fathers act as the protectors of their families. Who goes downstairs when there's a noise at 2:00 A.M.? And despite the pervasiveness of two-income families, it's fathers who can work without interruption throughout the nine months of pregnancy and the demanding years of a child's infancy to ensure that the family's basic needs are met.

THERE IS A quality, too, that fathers bring to their role that seems to be necessary for the rearing of well-adjusted, well-rounded people. A child-support check does not suffice. And, one suspects, Alan Alda models do not suffice either. Single mothers are less effective parents not just because one must do the work of two, but because children need a father's influence and example.

Fathers have more natural authority than mothers. They are taller, stronger, and louder than women. They are emotionally tougher. And at some very basic level, kids, especially boys, figure out that even very mild fathers are more threatening than mothers. There are moments in the rearing of a child when healthy fear is a necessary thing. A feminist friend of mine confided her shock upon first hearing herself say to an unruly child, "Wait till your father gets home!"

Because fathers are less naturally forgiving than mothers, less blinded to their children's faults, they play a key role in character development. Children fear to disappoint either of their parents, of course. But which one do they think is more likely to be disappointed in them? Certainly there are individual variations: Some mothers are more censorious and unappeasable than some fathers. But in general, it is fathers who tend to set the standards for their children—mothers who offer understanding and forgiveness.

Jeane Kirkpatrick, who made her three sons her first priority when they were young, recalls that when her children reached the ages of ten and eleven, they began to seek more from their father and need less from her. "In every culture throughout written history," she notes, "there is role distinction between men and women. Ubiquity tells us something about its utility."

Fathers teach sons what it means to be a man and daughters what it means to be loved by a man. Boys raised without fathers are so unsure of their masculinity that they become far more prone to express it through violence than sons of intact families. Seventy percent of inmates at juvenile detention homes are fatherless boys. Daughters raised by mothers alone, and thus starved for male attention, are far more likely to become promiscuous teenagers and single moms themselves than are girls who grow up with steady fathers.

Men's shoulders are for hoisting toddlers on. Women's shoulders are for crying on. It has always been so. It will always be so. A mother's love is the cocoon of childhood. A father's love offers children the equipment to leave home.

FOR THE PAST quarter century we've been steeped in morality tales about the damage that overbearing and overly strict fathers have done. The locus of pathology, we've been instructed, is to be found in the secret heart of the "typical" two-parent family, where abuse, beatings, and incest are said to lurk. For the next quarter century, we may be tutored on the opposite problem—the moral decay that undermines a society in which fathers cease to perform their civilizing role in large numbers. The most recent and comprehensive data on divorce and single parent families show that fatherless families produce children with lower IQs, higher suicide rates, more abortions, more illegitimate births, poorer school performance, more trouble with the law, more drugs, more violence, and more mental illness than intact families.

It is quite amazing that something as basic to women's nature as motherhood has been so successfully distorted while fatherhood has been so misunderstood. What infertility should have taught Anne Taylor Fleming is that some facts in life are givens. Culture is important. But it didn't create the mothering urge, and it cannot silence it. ◆

Mona Charen is a nationally syndicated columnist.

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Poll Pourri

Listen to Mom

Polls show the majority of women want less time at the office, reports ***Karlyn Bowman***

When NBC NEWS and the *Wall Street Journal* asked whether more mothers working outside the home was a step in the right direction for American society, a step in the wrong direction, or something that wouldn't make any difference, men and women agreed: A plurality of both sexes in the December 1997 poll said this was a step in the *wrong* direction (43% for men, 41% for women). Barely three in ten (31% for both men and women) thought the trend was a step in the right direction.

It's interesting to note that the answers were not affected by whether the respondents worked or not: Forty percent of women employed full-time, 40% of women employed part-time, and 42% of women who weren't working outside the home said the trend was a bad one.

When the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press posed a similar question to women in March 1997, 41% said the trend of mothers of young children working outside the home was a bad thing for society. Just 17% said this was a good thing.

Asked by Pew about other trends relating to families, the women in the poll felt that more single women deciding to have children without a male partner was a bad thing for society (65%). Fully 62% felt that way about more unmarried couples deciding to have children, and 56% about more homosexual couples deciding to do so. Fewer than 10% felt that any of these three things were a good thing for society.

As for having your cake and eating it too, when asked by NBC News and the *Wall Street Journal* to respond to the statement, "Most women can't have it all—a career and a family—without making a lot of sacrifices in both areas," a whopping 78% of women and 74% of men agreed.

So which would they sacrifice first, career or kids? Mothers of children under age eighteen surveyed in the Pew poll said that their relationship with their children was most important to their personal happiness (86% rated this aspect of their lives at "ten" on a ten-point scale). Just 30% of women employed full- or part-time rated their job as a "ten" in terms of personal happiness.

Furthermore, when Gallup asked in 1995 whether people felt they generally had enough time for their job, 74% said they did; 63% felt that way about sleep, and 55% about their household chores. Last on the list was their children: Just 44% of parents with children said they generally had enough time for the kids; 54% said they did not.

Do these trends in public opinion represent a backlash against women? If so, it's a backlash by women themselves. Since 1974, Roper Starch Worldwide has asked women whether they would prefer to stay home and take care of a house and family or whether they would prefer to work outside the home—if they were free to do either. In 1974, 60% of women said they would prefer to stay home and 35% said they wanted to work outside the home. When Roper repeated the question in September 1997, 52% said they would prefer to stay home, and 44% said they prefered to work.

But there's hope for feminists: In 1991, Roper began asking men the same question. That year, 77% of men said they would prefer to have a job outside the home, but 19% said they wanted to stay home. In the new survey, fully a quarter of men said they wanted to stay home and take care of their homes and families. ◆

Karlyn Bowman is a resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.

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Continued from page 2

that non-family care of very young children tends to be damaging. The call for "universal child care" has become a mantra among women's groups, a cure-all, and the yardstick by which they judge any politician's commitment to women's equality. Yet the Department of Health and Human Services could announce tomorrow that it is creating a system of completely free day-care centers, each one headed by a cloned Mary Poppins, and the problem wouldn't go away. For despite all the reassurances to the contrary, the woman who kisses her child's forehead each morning before going to work still harbors the agonizing suspicion that what her child needs most is *her*.

Feminists tend to react angrily to this sentiment. Mothers shouldn't always have to be the ones to sacrifice their work for their children. It's disturbingly sexist to say that women are "better" at caring for infants, or more suited to it, than men. And anyway, feminists argue, the issue is moot, because even if most women wanted to, they couldn't afford to stay home with their kids, and it's elitist to suggest that they should.

But the question we ought to be asking is why, in the space of a generation, we have we come to consider taking care of our own kids—even if it's just for the few short years before they are in school—as a perk of the rich, like yachting. This was not true even in the depths of the Great Depression.

It *is* true that working- and middle-class women have always done work of some kind—whether it was voluntary, or part-time, or from their homes. But it is odd that, in the richest period *ever* in our history, we should suddenly be considering a massive federal program to care for infants because the majority of mothers feel they have "no choice" but to work.

Part of the reason for that perception of lack of choice, of course, is the burden of taxes an average family is expected to shoulder today compared to thirty years ago, and the penalties in our tax code that make it more costly for one parent to stay home. My generation is also accused—justly—of having higher expectations for our standard of living than our parents or grandparents did.

But I think the fundamental reason why mothers of small children feel the need to work today, when a generation ago they didn't, is the meltdown of the family. Even before a modern woman becomes a mother, even before she marries, she expects she will have to support herself. All around her are vast new numbers of single mothers, for whom remaining in the workforce *is* an act of economic necessity. The greater prospect of divorce for a woman today, the fear of having to fend for herself and her children at some point, underlies why even happily married women often feel obliged to work when there's no immediate financial reason for them to do so. Combine the women who must work because they are single mothers and the women who feel they should work to protect themselves lest they become single mothers, and you realize that what looks like a child-care crisis is really a symptom of America's larger marriage crisis.

Okay, feminist critics may still argue, even if we all went back to the traditional marriages of the 1950s, women would still want to work. Arlie Hochschild writes in her 1997 book, *The Time Bind*, of parents who "flee the pressures of home for the relief of work." But, really, what sort of argument is that? No one compels us to have babies. When we do bear them, we have an obligation to care for them, no matter how dull or tiring that may be. The New York animal shelters will not let you adopt a cat or dog if you work full-time; why should our attitude toward children be any less?

The fact is, when children come along, *someone* has to accommodate them. A woman who has carried the baby around for nine months inside of her usually finds it natural to do so—and often impossible not to. A Roper poll of women's attitudes toward work, which has been conducted periodically since 1974, finds that a substantial majority (53 percent to 41 percent) of married women would prefer to stay home with their young children if they could—and that this majority has been growing since 1985.

This preference, however, is mostly ignored. Labor unions decry Third World factories where workers stitch and assemble with their children at their feet. But in the sleek settings of managerial America, this same practice is being hailed as a progressive way to combine motherhood and work. Some companies are opening sick rooms for employees' children, staffed by nurses, so a parent never has to take a day off to care for a sniffling son or daughter. Cutting-edge day-care centers are installing cameras that parents can access on the Internet from the office. Other companies and organizations allow employees to bring their infants to the offices, and are experimenting with breast-feeding on the job.

No one seems to find any of these solutions creepy. But think—what these policies are saying to women is this: You must never, *ever* think about taking *five minutes* away from the office, not even for a newborn child.

And what do these policies say, too, to the children themselves? From their earliest memories, the love they receive, the attention they get, will have been squeezed in around office schedules and ringing phones. Home will be for them the place of emotional upheaval and flash-

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ing tempers and food gulped in front of the television; it will be their day-care centers that offer them stability, security, and people who care that they have learned to stack blocks and mold Play-Doh.

Twenty years ago, psychologists caught up in the intellectual fashions of the moment insisted that divorce not only was fine for children, it was good for them: Kids, they insisted, did better with one parent than two who were unhappily married. Now that the children of that generation have grown up, the data is irrefutable: Divorce, however good it might be for parents, is a disaster for children. I often have the sense when I hear day-care advocates extolling its benefits that the results of their experiment will prove equally catastrophic when the results are measured a decade or two from now.

When you think about it, it seems a poor trade-off for a society: valuing the work a woman does as a data processor or writing legal briefs more than the hours she might have devoted to helping her daughter feel her importance in the world. It is sad that in the space of a generation, full-time motherhood has sunk from being regarded as a strong, noble, and vital task to one that garners pity at best, contempt at worst.

Let's remember: The average American woman of my generation will live eighty years. She will probably work for forty of those years. But for six or seven or eight of those years, she will be a mother to very young children. Does it make sense for society to attempt to reinvent itself so that she can more conveniently and inexpensively delegate the care of those babies to strangers? Or would it be better for society to try and figure out a way to help her care for them herself, and then return to work when her children are in school (or not return, if that is her preference)?

It may seem breathtakingly radical to phrase the question this way, to assert that the solution to the work/home dilemma involves imagining ways to help mothers of young children stay home. But if it does seem radical, that only shows how deeply the feminist beliefs about the primacy of work over family have been absorbed. I'd like to think that an enlightened society is not one in which all its economic and cultural forces combine to encourage women to deposit their children in state crèches and walk away without a backward glance.

In this special issue on motherhood, we offer our readers an unabashed defense of those women who dare to defy the feminist wisdom on which they were weaned and raised, to wean and raise their children themselves.

– Danielle Crittenden

This article is adapted from testimony Miss Crittenden gave before the United States Senate Subcommittee on Children and Families, in February.

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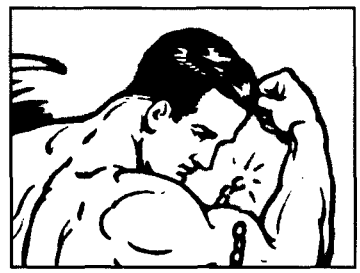
One last observation . . .

"Not *Again* Tonight, Dear. . .!"

Hillary Clinton may not be the only woman dismayed by Viagra, warns *Wendy Shalit*



Excitement was flying high for the new wonder love-drug for men, Viagra, even before its active ingredient, sildenafil citrate, was approved for marketing in March. When Pfizer was testing the drug, samples were actually stolen from cabinets. Even men who have no problems with impotence will become better lovers on Viagra—or so goes the hype. *Time* magazine interviewed a seventy-three-year-old retired fireman, who lives at a nudist resort and reported having sex "as often as three or four times a week with several girlfriends in their twenties" *without* Viagra. Still, he expressed envy toward his best friend, seventy-year-old Frank, who took Viagra and is doing even better. In fact, Frank "turned into a monster," he told *Time* admiringly. The two are said to be planning a "Viagra party."

But will any women attend? That is the question. Over the past month I have heard many women privately express reservations about our new ennui elixir, yet very few have registered objections in print, let alone, God forbid, to their sweethearts. I can only assume that they fear being thought sexually repressed. *Time* summed up the case nicely: "What's not to like about Viagra?..It will be hard for wet blankets and smarty-pants to compete with the siren calls coming out of sex clinics around the country from men 'feeling 18 again.'" Female objections must be raised, however, before Viagra becomes the male equivalent of the white wine spritzer:

1. Any drug that forces us to read an endless series of articles about "prolonged and firmer erections" with our 8:00 A.M. coffee is perverse. It's really that simple. It's just too early in the morning for this kind of news.

2. Perhaps Viagra fulfills some male pornographic fantasy, but I am not convinced that it fulfills the female one. My friends may be unrepresentative, but after several years' worth of late-night phone conversations, I have concluded that the female sexual fantasy is prolonged testimonies of love, prolonged cuddling, or—most popular—prolonged apologies. More satisfying would have been a pill that makes a man declare, "Oh, darling, really, I'm so, so sorry! Let's go to Bergdorf's." Still, even if the pharmaceutical companies could design such a drug, most women wouldn't want a pill-induced apology. Why? It wouldn't be sincere. An artificially-induced sexual response is undesirable for the same reason.

3. Any cursory tour of the headlines—sexual harassment, date rape, marital rape, etc.—reveals that our society's collective sexual dysfunction, such as it is, is not male impotence but quite the opposite. As one married friend of mine put it, in utter horror: "You mean now I have to have even *more* sex?" Or, to take an extreme example, imagine our President on Viagra. All better now? I didn't think so.

4. Just as Viagra would sharpen the distress of victimized women, so would it aggravate the plight of victimized men. Men should also have the right to say no to sex. If wives can now rejoin: "Here, take this!" where can the men run? Viagra tears down the last refuge of the henpecked husband.

5. The latest twist in the papers is the talk about testing Viagra for women. We too suffer from "flagging libido," say the experts. This doesn't seem to make much sense. What's the net effect if both men and women are on Viagra? Wouldn't all this mutual artificial excitement ultimately cancel out? If no one wants to have sex, why don't we just save our money and tell each other jokes? Or, better yet, simply get dressed, step out, and contribute to the gross national product?

6. On a more serious note, there may be something to be said for occasional male impotence. Emotions are inescapable whenever humans have sex. Impotence is a reminder of that, and of our mortality as well. We are playing dangerous games in seeking to remove the possibility of impotence. If our physical responses are no longer at the mercy of our emotions, and no longer subject to exigencies like age either, we may succeed only in expunging the erotic. Contrary to conventional wisdom, I predict that sex under a Viagra regime will not be as fun. ◆

Wendy Shalit is a contributing editor of the City Journal *in New York. This article was excerpted from* TWQ *in the May 18 issue of* National Review.

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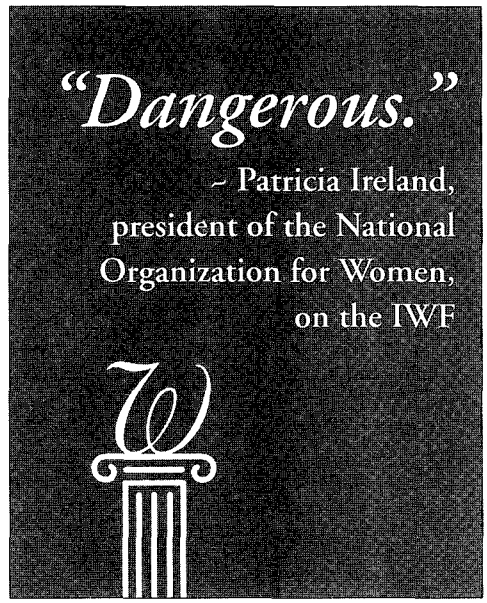

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